

## TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HB 5397 and SB 477

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Roye Anastasio-Bourke, from New Haven. I am Co-Chair of the Do Not Stand Idly By anti-gun violence team, which is part of CONECT, representing more than 30,000 citizens from a wide variety of faith-based congregations in Fairfield and New Haven counties.

I testify today in favor of HB-5397 and SB 477.

On average, here in Connecticut, someone is murdered with a gun every three days. In spite of our many effective and necessary gun laws, last year gun homicides were the highest in 25 years. Clearly, there is urgent need for a new approach to end the intolerable scourge of violence.

Rather than a decentralized approach through numerous small and underfunded efforts, a well-funded state office would coordinate efforts and employ the expertise and resources to intervene in hard-hit communities with targeted, evidenced-based programs that work.

For too many CT children, gun violence is a constant presence. My cousin is a dedicated elementary school teacher in a Connecticut city. One student, just 12 years old, has already been arrested for armed robbery, his house has been pummeled with bullets in drive-by shootings and he is a known gang member whose life has been threatened by another gang. Students are scared to be anywhere near this boy. Here's some of what they said: "Can you please send him to another school? They will shoot him, they will come and shoot us." According to my cousin, the school's hands are tied, other than to remain vigilant. It costs too much to send him to another learning institution and the school would be responsible for paying.

Community-based interventions that target potential perpetrators or likely victims have proven to interrupt the cycle of violence and might have prevented the troubled youth from needing to engage in robbery or gang activity.

In the long run, we would save money as well as lives. It is estimated that gun violence costs Connecticut taxpayers between \$60 and \$90 million annually, and carries a yearly societal cost of up to \$1.2 billion.

Successful passage of these two bills will make a statement of our true priorities, and finally help create a lasting solution. After all, our children are our future and they deserve to grow up feeling safe so they can develop into the productive citizens we need.

Sincerely,

Roye Anastasio-Bourke

Co-Chair, CONECT/Do Not Stand Idly By Anti-Gun Violence Team

New Haven, CT